

U.S., Canadian Officials Discuss Ways to Stop Terrorists Challenge to keep border "open to business, closed to terrorism"

U.S. Homeland Security Director Tom Ridge and Canada's Deputy Prime Minister Anne McLellan discussed ways to build on the existing border agreement between the two countries to counter terrorism in discussions January 30 in Washington.

At a joint news conference following their talks, Ridge told reporters that "one of the most important challenges we face is protecting the more than 5,000 miles of border we share, keeping it open for business and closed to terrorism."

In the past two years, under the Smart Border Action Plan, "tremendous progress" has been made toward this goal, but "much more work" remains to be done, Ridge said.

"(W)e are having great success, not just at our land crossings but also at our ports, where cooperation between U.S. and Canadian border officials make it possible to identify high-risk shipments and share in-transit cargo information," he said.

"(W)e will not falter or leave our work unfinished, for the war on terror means rising to a new standard of protection every day, drawing strength from past accomplishments but never growing complacent about the future."

Ridge thanked McLellan and the Canadian Government "for their constancy in this work and their commitment to partner" with the U.S. in the war on terror.

"Together, we will make our homelands safe and secure and we will do all we can to ensure that those who fight on our shores far away, those who fight on shores far away, do not fight in vain," Ridge said.

McLellan said Canada also is "very pleased with the progress being made on the Smart Border Action Plan. It truly is remarkable what we have been able to accomplish in two short years," she said, adding that "a great many" of the original Smart Border action items have now been completed or are in final stages of implementation.

"There are, however, still initiatives which require our attention," she said, "such as the development of strategic border infrastructure to better support the growing movement of trade and travel across our land border."

Following is a transcript of Ridge and McLellan remarks, and the following question and answer session with reporters:

U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Remarks By Secretary of Homeland Security Tom Ridge and
Canadian Deputy Prime Minister Anne McLellan
Office of the Press Secretary
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Washington, D.C.

SECRETARY RIDGE: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. We apologize for keeping you waiting just a little bit but we had a -- actually, we had a very full agenda. It took us a little time to complete all the matters we wanted to discuss and we're grateful to have the opportunity to come down now and report on our work together.

First of all, as many of you know, during the past two and a half years, I've had the pleasure of working with then-Deputy Prime Minister John Manley on the border agreement that we began working on about two years ago. And not surprisingly, very, very shortly after Deputy Prime Minister McLellan was identified by Prime Minister Martin as succeeding him, as well as being given the portfolio to build on that border agreement, John Manley gave me a call.

He said the individual the Prime Minister has appointed not only has the confidence, obviously, of the Prime Minister but the ability and the desire to build on the border agreement and you're going to enjoy very much working with her on a personal as well as a professional level. I must tell you that our mutual friend John Manley had it right. We've had a very productive and very enjoyable day and a half together, Deputy Prime Minister, and again, officially and publicly, we welcome you on your first official visit with us.

I'm very pleased that Deputy Prime Minister McLellan and I have had the opportunity today to discuss the progress and work that still awaits us in our efforts to provide a safe and secure border for our citizens.

Since the tragic events of 9/11, America has been fortunate to have such a steadfast ally and friend in our neighbor to the north. As we have all seen, the war on terrorism is not an isolated conflict. It is an ongoing struggle, fought by all freedom-loving nations, a war waged against an enemy that harbors the desire and willingness to use any weapon, any means to harm the innocent and destroy a way of life we all cherish.

Earlier this week, we were reminded of the costs of this war when a Canadian soldier lost his life in Afghanistan and three other soldiers were injured. And just yesterday, seven American soldiers were killed and three more were injured in Afghanistan where thousands of our troops still serve.

Our heartfelt condolences go out to the families of these brave men as well as our gratitude for their sacrifice and the sacrifice of all the men and women who are serving on the front lines in this conflict.

As the President made clear in his State of the Union address, we've not come all this way through tragedy and trial and war only to falter and leave our work unfinished. So as American and Canadian soldiers fight side by side on the front lines, our governments, our Border Patrol officers, our citizens must also work side by side to ensure the security of our nation here at home.

Of course, one of the most important challenges we face is protecting the more than 5,000 miles of border we share, keeping it open for business and closed to terrorism. In the past two years, under the Smart Border Action Plan, we've made tremendous progress toward this goal.

A cornerstone of that work has been the implementation of the Free and Secure Trade program, or FAST. Companies that undergo extensive security checks and shore up their weaknesses are rewarded with expedited processing at the borders. FAST is now in place at the 12 highest-volume land border crossings. And just a few weeks ago, I was in Port Huron to dedicate the first designated FAST lane.

In addition to FAST, NEXUS, which is our frequent traveler program, is also operational at most major border crossings. And while FAST and NEXUS provide security and keep things moving at

the border, our integrated border enforcement teams have pulled together law enforcement officials from both sides of the border to monitor and target criminal activity.

And we are having great success, not just at our land crossings but also at our ports, where cooperation between U.S. and Canadian border officials make it possible to identify high-risk shipments and share in-transit cargo information.

So as we look back, we find a record of tremendous accomplishments. But there is much more work that remains to be done and we will not falter or leave our work unfinished, for the war on terror means rising to a new standard of protection every day, drawing strength from past accomplishments but never growing complacent about the future.

I look forward to continuing to work with Deputy Prime Minister McLellan as we addressed issues ranging from the U.S.-VISIT implementation to the security of our shared critical infrastructures and to another integration of the Smart Border agreement. We need to take what we've done over the past couple of years and take it up a notch and do additional work together on both the security and the economic side.

Already the Deputy Prime Minister has proven a valuable partner as we've worked closely together, especially during the holiday period of heightened alert, to address mutual security concerns.

I want to thank her and the Canadian Government for their constancy in this work and their commitment to partner with us in the war on terror. Together, we will make our homelands safe and secure and we will do all we can to ensure that those who fight on our shores far away, those who fight on shores far away, do not fight in vain.

We thank you very much. Again, it is my great pleasure to introduce to the members of the American press who may not have had the opportunity to meet with her, Deputy Prime Minister Anne McLellan.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER MCLELLAN: Thank you. Thank you very much, Mr. Secretary. It is a great pleasure to be here and first of all, let me thank you, Mr. Secretary, and everyone from the Department of Homeland Security for making me and my staff and my officials feel very welcome here over the past day.

And as you have mentioned, you enjoyed a very positive and constructive relationship with my former colleague and former Deputy Prime Minister John Manley, and let me say that you have my 100 percent commitment to work with you in the same dedicated and committed way that he and his staff did, because obviously, at the end of the day, that is to the mutual benefit of both our countries and the citizens, Canadians and Americans who live in those countries.

So Secretary Ridge and I have, as he has mentioned, spoken several times since December and let me say publicly, Mr. Secretary, that I particularly appreciated the fact within 24 hours of my appointment, you called me and thanked me and welcomed me in terms of this new position that I now hold and I sincerely appreciated that.

I share the sentiments already stated by Secretary Ridge. We are very pleased with the progress being made on the Smart Border Action Plan. It truly is remarkable what we have been able to accomplish in two short years.

When the Smart Border declaration was signed in Ottawa in December, 2001, our primary objective was to work toward ensuring that the terrible events of September the 11th would never be repeated. Since then, I think we have built on to this -- built on this very important objective.

We have realized, as we work through the various Smart Border initiatives, that through effective risk management, we can combine facilitation of legitimate goods and travel with ensuring the security of our borders. The two objectives can and must be complementary.

My meeting with Mr. Secretary Ridge this morning has allowed us to take stock of the Smart Border Action Plan. Progress is continuing on key initiatives. A great many of the original Smart Border action items have now been completed or are in final stages of implementation. There are, however, still initiatives which require our attention. Such is the development of strategic border infrastructure to better support the growing movement of trade and travel across our land border.

Today, Secretary Ridge and I also discussed ways in which we could strengthen and deepen our border cooperation. I am looking forward to continuing to work with Secretary Ridge and his officials in these discussions. There is clearly so much more that we can do to ensure the public safety and economic security of our two countries.

And let me say on behalf of the Prime Minister and the Canadian people that I want to express our deepest sympathy this morning for the loss of the lives of seven American soldiers in Afghanistan yesterday. I think we in both our countries are constantly reminded of the cost, the human cost and sacrifice that goes in relation to the battle against terrorism, wherever it is fought.

And so on behalf of the Prime Minister and the Canadian people, our deepest sympathy to you, Mr. Secretary, and the American people. And I think with that, again, I thank you very much for welcoming me here and I look forward to working with you.

Now just before we turn it over to all these wonderful people sitting out here for questions, I want to acknowledge Parliamentary Secretary Scott Brison who came with me to Washington, and some of you may know, the Prime Minister has three parliamentary secretaries, and Scott Brison is one of those parliamentary secretaries and I think it speaks to the singular nature of the Canada-U.S. relationship, that Scott Brison is Parliamentary Secretary reporting directly to the Prime Minister on Canada-U.S. relations.

And Scott, it's a real pleasure for both Secretary Ridge and me to have you join us over this past day.

QUESTION: The Canadian Government has called an inquiry into the deportation of Mahar Arar. I'm just wondering, will the U.S. -- will U.S. officials be available to answer questions to that inquiry? And does the U.S. have any concerns about the secrecy of national security information that might be conveyed during the time of that inquiry?

SECRETARY RIDGE: Well, not only have you reported now that -- the official inquiry that was explained to me by the Deputy Prime Minister, but this individual has seen to it to file a lawsuit against several American political figures, and you're talking to one, of those who are named in the suit, so I think it's inappropriate for me to, the advice of counsel, to comment at all on any aspect of this, of this litigation, either directed toward me or the interaction between the two governments.

QUESTION: Minister, can you just brief us on what you told Secretary Ridge or Mr. Ashcroft regarding U.S. information that might be of national security?

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER MCLELLAN: First of all, let me say that I will be meeting Attorney General Ashcroft only after this press conference so I haven't told him anything at this point. But Secretary Ridge and I had the opportunity this morning to talk about the public inquiry that I called on Wednesday into the Mahar Arar matter and clearly that inquiry is now in place. Mr. Justice O'Connor is in place and it would be inappropriate for me to comment on the details of that inquiry. It is now in the hands of Mr. Justice O'Connor.

But obviously, I do want to say this. The mandate is clear. It is, in fact, to look at the actions of Canadian officials in relation to Mahar Arar's deportation and detention.

QUESTION: Secretary Ridge, will Canada be invited to join the anti-proliferation partnership? Or can you speak to that subject?

SECRETARY RIDGE: I cannot. That is a matter that I would prefer others more conversant with it would comment upon. Sir.

QUESTION: The Alaska-Canada border is often one of the forgotten borders and I'm just wondering from both of you, where do you think improvements have been made on that border and where do you think improvements need to be made on that border, because there are concerns about it even though there is less traffic than the other borders that we think of?

SECRETARY RIDGE: Well, it's interesting that you talk about that because as we go about reorganizing the Department of Homeland Security, we recognize that there is a very unique state that has a very unique relationship with Canada. And I think that we recognize there are some unique needs up there and they have been identified internally and will be addressed as we reorganize the Department a little bit.

But I think clearly, the most important presence in Alaska has been the Coast Guard and they'll continue to be the most important presence up there. But again, over the next couple of months, the uniqueness of that relationship will be a matter of discussions between the Deputy Prime Minister and myself, who was kind enough, I might add -- do you mind if I mention? -- to invite our delegation to Ottawa sometime this spring in order to keep the momentum that we think is rather considerable at this point and we want to continue to promote that. So we will address that more specifically.

But we know it's unique. The Coast Guard's the primary Homeland Security asset there, but there be other things we might be able to do together.

QUESTION: What are you thinking of specifically?

SECRETARY RIDGE: We will tell you when we draw that conclusion, okay?

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, what would you say is one of the greatest remaining danger points in terms of border security? Would it be in the marine area? And could you talk a little bit about plans to coordinate container inspections in foreign countries like China, I gather, is pretty high on your priority.

SECRETARY RIDGE: Within maritime, again, the gentleman question that was asked before, I think we know, we view the next -- one of the next steps we will take as we build on the existing agreement is to take a look at the maritime security which obviously affects Alaska, perhaps, more than another area. We have literally thousands of waterways that we need to contend with on the Great Lakes. And I suspect that will, again, part of our next iteration of what we will do together to enhance security there.

The -- believe the second part of your question had to deal with --

QUESTION: Coordination in foreign countries.

SECRETARY RIDGE: Yes, the CSI, our Container Security Initiative. We think this is a unique opportunity and I'll let the Deputy Prime Minister speak to this, because of our positioning of some of our Customs and Border Patrol people there and the willingness of the host government to provide some technology so, based on our analysis of the manifests that we get 24 hours in advance, and I think that's the same process that you're going through, we coordinate that

process and we've invited the Canadian Government to, in ports of interest, that they assign people as well so we can work together on shipments to North America, be it Canada or the United States.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER MCLELLAN: Just let me say that my colleague, the Minister of Transport, is the lead on that particular initiative, but in fact, we're very committed to participating in this initiative and obviously, is another example of, I think, a level of cooperation and integration to keep North America secure.

QUESTION: While you're there, Madame Minister, if I might ask, there's been some American officials who have expressed a little "chafiness" if I could put it that way, about the fact that the Canadians have not responded to an invitation for Mr. Martin to come to the United States.

As they've talked about this, they say they understand Martin is attempting to position his government to -- for a long-term relationship with the Bush Administration. You're going to be meeting with the Vice President. What are you going to tell him about all this?

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER MCLELLAN: Are you asking me what I'm going to ask him about a possible visit of the Prime Minister to Washington?

QUESTION: Yes, since the American Government has invited the Prime Minister.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER MCLELLAN: And in fact, I know that there are discussions between the Prime Minister's office and the White House in relation to when that visit might take place. And let me underscore that I think Prime Minister Martin has made it absolutely plain that he sees the singular nature of the relationship between Canada and the United States and therefore I would hope that no one is under any illusions here or in Canada about that and the fact that as soon as it can be arranged to the mutual convenience of both leaders, that meeting will take place.

QUESTION: Will you be telling him that there is a specific date or dates that you're interested in having the Prime Minister go down to the United States?

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER MCLELLAN: Well, it is up to the Prime Minister and the President to decide what is mutually convenient for those two leaders in terms of when they actually sit down and meet again after Monterrey.

But certainly I will be making it quite plain to Vice President Cheney that our relationship with the United States is one of singular importance and friendship and that as soon as there are convenient dates that can be worked out, that meeting will take place.

QUESTION: Ms. McLellan, could you indicate to what extent and how Canada will be sharing its information on its lists of terrorists with the United States' new database and the terrorist screening center?

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER MCLELLAN: I think all I can say about that is that clearly the two countries work very closely together. We're interested wherever possible and appropriate to integrate our systems. Obviously, both countries have watchlists, both countries share information in relation to those watchlists and we are obviously working in a wide range of areas in terms of where possible threats and risks might exist and how we collect information and data in relation to those threats and risks and then how we go about sharing it.

But again, let me be absolutely clear, level of cooperation is outstanding. We will continue to build on the existing level of cooperation, and of course, part of what we want to do as we move forward is see, in fact, where we need to go next. We've accomplished a lot in terms of securing our two countries' borders, but clearly, whether it's in relation to maritime security, perhaps

additional measures as it relates to aviation security, what we will be doing and we've started today is identify where we can go further and do more. And where that can be done together and in an integrated fashion, obviously so much the better.

QUESTION: On the question of lists, do you see limits as to what you will share with the United States?

SECRETARY RIDGE: I would just -- if I might -- both countries have constitutional and privacy laws that we will -- we both recognize and understand in any deliberations. I mean, we -- sovereigns that work together clearly, but there may be limitations based on sovereign law. We're mindful of both and to the extent that we can collaborate consistent with our constitution and our laws, we do. When one law differs from the other, then obviously that means we have to find another way, perhaps, in another area to collaborate.

MR. ROEHRKASSE: We have time for one more question.

QUESTION: Minister McLellan, further to that, I just wanted to ask specifically about the CAPPs II system and whether there are any Canadian concerns regarding the privacy provisions as it pertains to Canadian citizens flying into this country.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER MCLELLAN: Well, we talked briefly about CAPPs II this morning and clearly we want to work with our American counterparts. We want to understand both the details of and the timing of that program as it rolls out. And as that happens, quite clearly we will deal with issues as they arise.

QUESTION: Secretary Ridge --

SECRETARY RIDGE: If I might just comment, if I might just a moment though, again, in response to your question, the gentleman before you, we spent several months working with our colleagues in the European Union to get advanced passenger information. And clearly there were privacy concerns that the European Union has; it's very much a part of the charter. I mean, they didn't have -- I mean, it's a very significant part of what the European Union, as they presently exist, is concerned about.

And through a series of prolonged but substantive negotiations, we are not only to get access to some of that information but an agreement because of the limited purpose for which it would be used and how it would be used as part of the pilot on the CAPPs II program. And that is another level of discussions that we have just begun in a preliminary way with the Canadian Government.

We hope we can achieve the same result as we did with the European Union, but again, recognizing privacy laws. We understand that it's a lengthy and appropriate discussion. It will have to be held -- it's by no means automatic because we got the agreement with the EU that we get one with the Canadian Government. But we have done it based on mutual recognition of limited purpose and use. We'll see what happens in the future. We can't determine right now.

QUESTION: Thank you.